



You'll Get a Recharge out of This The LaCrosse BC-900

By Larry Van Horn, MT Assistant Editor

I must admit in recent years I have joined the technology revolution and become a bit of a gadget freak. Let's take a quick inventory: I have four handheld scanners, a GPS unit, two digital cameras, two FRS units, several cool flashlights, several remotes for the home entertainment system, three remote weather stations, and a laser pointer.

I really like and use all these gadgets, but a major problem is powering all these fun toys. After I purchased the first few, I soon realized that I was spending a small fortune in batteries. In fact, it was getting so expensive, I was expecting a personal invitation to attend the next stockholder meeting from that "Copper Top" company you see advertised on TV. So what is a fella to do?

Well, I decided that rechargeable batteries were the way to go. But I soon found that not all battery chargers, nor all batteries, are equal. Recently, while testing the new GRE PSR-500 handheld, I thought I had a battery life issue with the scanner. I contacted the development team and they pointed out that the battery life wasn't the issue, it was the batteries themselves.

One member of the team suggested that I look into getting a La Crosse Technology BC-900. He also had some concerns with battery life at first until he picked up a La Crosse BC-900 intelligent charger. Using this smart charger, he was able to determine that both of his primary sets of four AA NiMH batteries had a bad cell in each set! The BC-900 came to his rescue.

One Google search later and I had a BC-900 on its way to Brasstown. Yes, I know – another gadget!

❖ What is It?

The La Crosse Technology Alpha Power BC-900 Battery Charger and Recovery System is a compact, lightweight, and easy-to-use charger for all AA and AAA nickel-cadmium (NiCd) and nickel metal hydride (NiMH) rechargeable batteries. You can even use the AA batteries in devices that require C- and D-size batteries with the included adapters. Both AA and AAA batteries can be charged simultaneously, but the unit will not charge defective batteries.

With the BC-900, you eliminate the negatives of shortening a rechargeable battery's life by recharging it when it is not fully discharged and of overcharging it. The BC-900 is an intelligent charging unit that provides quick and optimum charging of your batteries. The unit has overheat detection to prevent overcharging.

An informative LCD display and large function keys (pushbuttons) are just two of many useful features on the BC-900 battery charger and recovery system.

The BC-900 has four battery compartments, each with a numbered key. There are number function keys used to select a particular battery compartment for charging and to display the operating mode. The mode key is used to select any of the four operating modes described below. The display key lets you scroll through the various displays. These are charging current (in mA), time elapsed (hh:mm), terminal voltage (in V), and accumulated capacity (in mAh or Ah).

In conjunction with the number keys, you can select the charging mode and view the displays individually for each battery compartment. Finally, the current key lets you select the amount of charging current to be applied if you wish it to be more than the factory-default 200 mA.

❖ Modes of Operation

In the charge mode, when you place a battery in the BC-900, the unit displays the voltage and the charge level of the battery. The unit then begins charging (at the factory-default 200mA) up to the maximum voltage and then switches to trickle charging when the battery is fully charged. As an alternative to automatic 200 mA charging in all four operating modes, you can manually select any of several higher charging currents, depending upon how many batteries are in the charger.



The discharge mode is used for removing the memory effects of rechargeable batteries. In this mode, the batteries are discharged and then recharged at lower current levels. Finally, the batteries are charged at their full capacity.

In refresh mode, old batteries and those that have not been used for a long time can be recharged. This mode recovers the optimum capacity of the rechargeable batteries by repeating discharging and charging cycles until no further increase in measured capacities occurs.

In the test mode, the batteries are first fully charged and then discharged to determine their capacities. Next, the batteries are charged again, and the capacity in mAh or Ah (milliamp-hours or amp-hours) is shown after the charging ends.

Trickle charging is a feature that automatically turns on when a charging cycle is complete. This keeps the batteries freshly charged until you need them.

❖ What's in the Box and Specifications?

The BC-900 package includes the charging unit, a 5-foot, 2-inch AC/DC adapter, one set of AA and AAA NiMH rechargeable batteries, C-size and D-size battery adapters, a black nylon travel/storage case, a quick set-up manual, detailed instruction manual, and other miscellaneous paperwork. Other specifications include:

- Charging current range: 200mA (default) to 1800mA, user-selectable
- Maximum charging capacity: 3000 mAh
- Input voltage for ac/dc adapter: 100 to 240Vac, 50 or 60Hz, 0.6A
- Adapter output: +3.0Vdc, 4.0A
- Charger dimensions: 3.0 inches (76 mm) high x 5.1 inches (126 mm) wide x 1.5 inches (38 mm) deep

❖ Bottom Line

This unit retails for \$79.95, but you can find deep discounts at various vendors online.

I was blown away with this battery charger. If you use a lot of batteries, then this unit is a must. This really cool charger has lots of features that are sure to satisfy the most technically minded among us. With its charging, discharging, refreshing, and capacity testing functions, as well as individual displays for its four charging compartments, the BC-900 battery charger is economical, reliable, user-friendly, and ideal for use in home or office and while traveling.